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AUTHOR Smolich, Robert S.
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ABSTRACT

The Illinois Master Plan-Phase III, which stresses the urgent need for the state to achieve a completely integrated system of higher education through consortia or regional Collegiate Common Markets (CCM), is actually not a new idea, but is in many ways a revitalization of the philosophies espoused by William Rainey Harper at the beginning of the twentieth century. A conceptual model comparing the laissez-faire, or traditional system, with the CCM delivery system is used as a backdrop for comparing Harper's ideas with those concepts utilized in the present system of higher education. Harper recognized the limitations of individualism in education which resulted in wasted resources as each institution attempted to be all things to all men. Instead, Harper envisioned principles such as complementary individualism of institutions, coordinated educational planning, interinstitutional resource sharing, institutional conservation (as opposed to the present Darwinistic system whereby the weak institutions are weeded out), and campus intermigration, to be key guidelines in the ultimate development of higher education. (AH)

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WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER, MODERN SYSTEMS THINKING, AND ILLINOIS MASTER PLANNING

by

Robert S. Smolich
Dean of Academic Affairs
Spoon River College
Canton, Illinois

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Recently the President of a West-Central Illinois community college (Spoon River at Canton) proposed to the Executive Secretary of the State Junior College Board and to the Executive Director of the State Board of Higher Education that his area district and three others in the same geographical sector associate themselves into a consortium, or regional Collegiate Common Market (CCM).[1] The basic idea was that, without any of the affiliating institutions losing their district identities or sacrificing their local individualism, they might achieve significant economies by sharing some resources and by cutting out wasteful duplication of effort -- particularly in the way of providing high-cost technical programs with low student-instructor ratios.

The President's position paper, however, went much farther. It suggested that the proposed consortium might, in time, be developed into a true regional system of higher education. Might not the association include senior institutions, both public and private, as well as the two-year colleges? Could not all educational units within the region be unified, by a common objective related to statewide goals, into an integrated system?

To some, the idea of a regional consortium of public and private institutions may seem like a radical proposal -- or, at the very least,

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as a startlingly new and creative idea. That the idea is creative, there can be little doubt. But new? Well, not really. The fact is that the basic ideas -- ideas which clearly reflect the modern systems way of thinking -- go back, in Illinois, far into the past.

We must note, first of all, that the President who authored the consortium proposal was merely suggesting, in somewhat more concrete terms, what the Illinois Board of Higher Education itself had earlier recommended in a general way. In its Master Plan-Phase III, published in May, 1971, the Board had stressed the urgent need for the State to achieve a completely integrated system of higher education -- one which would make maximum use of all existing resources, both public and private -- and had suggested, as one means to this end, the development of proposals for CCM cooperation and sharing.

"While the ultimate objective of a common market is the statewide sharing of resources, programs, and opportunities," said the Board, "regional efforts may be the first step in many program areas."[2]

But the basic ideas of a CCM -- interinstitutional cooperation and sharing -- go back much farther than Master Plan-Phase III. They go back, in fact, to William Rainey Harper and the turn of the century, or about three-quarters of a century ago. While virtually everyone in the community-college field knows that Harper was "the father of the junior college," many may be unaware that the creative and energetic Biblical scholar who created the University of Chicago from scratch and who served as its first president between 1892 and 1906 was a modern systems thinker par excellence. As such, back in 1900 or earlier, he advocated, and indeed prophesized, some of the efforts toward system integration which are just now being undertaken in Illinois and in a few other states.

Let us see, then, how some of the CCM ideas which the Illinois Board of Higher Education expresses in Master Plan-Phase III match those which Dr. Harper, perhaps the most brilliant educational organizer who ever appeared on the American scene, enunciated long ago. Such a comparison may help to dispel the notion, still current among some, that proposals for an Illinois Collegiate Common Market are either "radical" or brand new.

To make such an analysis, we perhaps may be permitted to construct a tentative conceptual model of a CCM, regional or otherwise. Such a model, along with a contrasting description of the traditional or laissez faire system of higher education, is shown in the accompanying chart.

As this illustration shows, the most fundamental concept, applying to both the laissez faire and the CCM systems, is that of a Field of Educational Activity. This field may be a region within a state, a state as a whole, or, perhaps, even a grouping of several states. Within it, of course, many things are going on besides educational activity, but it is that kind of activity which is the focus of our immediate interest.

A second important concept shown in the chart is that of Institutional Multiplicity and Diversity -- an idea which, again, pertains to both the laissez faire and the CCM systems. Within the field of educational activity are many institutions, both public and private, which are formally organized to provide a variety of higher educational services -- many different "delivery systems", so to speak.

Institutional multiplicity and diversity is, indeed, a striking characteristic of the Illinois field of educational activity. Presently the State has something like 120 public and private institutions, including 37 public comprehensive community colleges, some of which have

FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY	
Institutional Multiplicity and Diversity	Institutional Multiplicity and Diversity
Unilateral Educational Planning and Action	Coordinated Educational Planning and Action
Harper's "Injurious Independence	Complimentary Individualism
Harper's "Petty Jealousies and Rivalries"	Productive Inter-institutional Rivalry
Wasteful Duplication of Resources	Interinstitutional Resource Sharing
Harper's "Foolish Independence and Selfishness"	Campus Intermigration
Social Darwinistic Weeding Out of the Weak	Institutional Conservation
Survival of Large, Rigid, and Unliked Institutions	Creative Flexibility and Orderly Growth
Laissez Faire Delivery System	CCM Delivery System

A Tentative Conceptual Model of a Collegiate Common Market Delivery System compared with the Traditional, or Laissez Faire, System.

established branch campuses. It was, in fact, the large number and variety of institutions of higher education which, back in 1961, more or less forced the Illinois General Assembly to create the Board of Higher Education and to mandate the development of a Master Plan for coordinating the multitude of delivery systems.

Here we may note that, were he alive today, William Rainey would doubtlessly give hearty approval to the planning and coordinating work which is now being done by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and its four subordinate units, which include the Junior College Board. At the turn of the century, as today, the American field of educational activity was marked by great institutional multiplicity and diversity (small, weak denominational colleges were particularly abundant); and Harper, whose whole life, according to Storr, was "an unceasing pursuit of unity,"[3] was revolted by the lack of system and order which he saw on every hand.

"With our thousands of educational institutions," he lamented in 1893, "there is at present no trace of system or order."[4]

Although he lived in an age which championed the laissez faire notion that government should do little more than keep order, enforce contracts, and protect private property, Harper clearly recognized the limitations of "rugged individualism" in education. In 1899, speaking before a group in New York, he predicted that, in time, the great waste which resulted from institutional multiplicity and diversity would be partially overcome "by the organization in every state of the union of some such agency as that of the Regents of the University of New York, to which shall be committed a general oversight of the educational affairs of the state."[5]

Thus Harper as much as predicted the ultimate development of a third element of our proposed conceptual model -- the idea of Coordinated

Educational Planning. As can be seen from the chart, this concept contrasts strongly with the corresponding laissez faire practice of "unilateral planning" -- the universal practice in Harper's day and still the dominant one in most fields of educational activity today. In order to shift from a traditional to a CCM system of educational delivery, the political and educational leaders of a field of educational activity must replace unilateralism with coordinated planning and action. In Illinois, the State has been in the process of making this change ever since Master Plan-Phase I was approved by the General Assembly in 1965.

For still another CCM concept, we have, from the chart, Complimentary Individualism, which is designed to replace what Harper aptly called "injurious independence." In a CCM system of educational delivery, the many different institutions, public and private, will all strive, through carefully defining their respective missions and scope of activities, to become complimentary individualists. That is to say, rather than all trying to cover the same ground and do the same things, each institution will, as the Illinois Board of Higher Education says, "develop those areas where it can be superlative and distinctive."[6]

The Board adds that the very condition of institutional multiplicity and diversity favors this kind of complementarity. "The fact that different institutions do different things well and no institution does all things superlatively," it says, "makes it appropriate to develop one educational marketplace among the many campuses."[7]

We can be sure that the systems-minded Harper would have appreciated that comment. Noting in his own time that virtually all the colleges and universities each tried "to cover the whole field of human knowledge," with the inevitable result that in the smaller institutions no single

discipline received "even decent attention," Harper exclaimed: "Why do intelligent men continue thus to sin against reason and God by bringing shame and reproach upon a cause so holy as that of higher education?"[8]

And again, scholarly investigator of the Old Testament that he was, Harper, who once said that "the forms of thought of the ancient Hebrews made a deep impression upon my mind,"[9] made a prophesy. The time would come, he predicted, when educational institutions would "cultivate individualism," and when "one institution will give a large measure of its strength and energy to the development of a department of history or politics, another to physics and chemistry, and another to the biological sciences ...."[10] The foolish and wasteful practice by which each institution tried to be all things to all men would, in the enlightened future, be changed by "the establishment of colleges for particular purposes."[11]

Closely allied with the idea of complimentary individualism is the proposed CCM concept of Productive Interinstitutional Rivalry. Though the systems way of thinking demands that institutions compliment, rather than directly compete with one another, it in no way implies that they are to be given the opportunity to grow soft and self-satisfied. Every institution, regardless of its scope or mission, can be encouraged to strive for and achieve excellence in "doing its own thing," so to speak. Wholesome or productive interinstitutional rivalry will then result from each institution attempting to accomplish the goal of excellence faster and better than other complimentary institutions within the same system.

At least Harper, back in 1900, thought so. Under a system of complimentary individualism, he said, the whole system would profit from "honorable and legitimate rivalry." In time, he believed, this kind of spur to achievement would replace the "petty jealousies and rivalries which today bring reproach and disgrace upon educational work."[12]

Going down the list of CCM concepts shown in the chart, we see that the next one is Interinstitutional Resource Sharing. The very sine qua non of the Collegiate Common Market ideal, the practice of this concept is designed to overcome one of the chief evils of the laissez faire delivery system -- wasteful duplication of resources.

Today, in Illinois, it is particularly urgent that institutions at all levels of higher education learn to avoid this kind of waste. As Master Plan-Phase III points out, it is now abundantly clear that financial resources available to higher education will be far less plentiful in the 1970's than they were during the heyday of the post-Sputnik era. Yet, excellent progress and growth can still be made -- not, though, by expanding facilities and other resources, but rather by making more extensive and efficient utilization of existing resources.

In line with this critical need, the Board of Higher Education has suggested a large number of ways by which consortia of cooperating institutions, whether associated on a statewide or on a regional basis, might significantly reduce waste by sharing some resources. It notes, for example, that great economics could be achieved through the cooperative sharing of computers, library books, and even instructional personnel.

While these ideas may sound brand new, Harper spoke in almost identical terms more than seven decades ago. He, of course, did not use the term "Collegiate Common Market," but he did suggest that the colleges and universities "of a geographical district" might well associate with one another, and that the members of such associations could profitably share many resources. He observed, among other things, that "there is no reason why a great specialist in a particular department might not be the servant of two or three institutions,"[13] thus securing for the small

college "privileges which today are far beyond its reach." Again, sounding much like the Illinois Board of Higher Education of today, he said that one key advantage of a consortium of small colleges and a large university would be "the loan of books and apparatus to the colleges by the university."[14]

In addition to providing an arrangement for the sharing of resources, programs, and opportunities, a CCM system of integrated higher education, as the chart shows, will attach considerable importance to what is perhaps an even more significant concept -- Campus Intermigration. Always important, the idea that within a field of educational activity students should enjoy the advantage of moving freely from campus to campus (and without loss of credit!) as they pursue their educational goals has assumed new urgency with the recent publication by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education of Less Time, More Options: Education Beyond the High School (McGraw-Hill, 1971). Among other things, the Commission recommends that "opportunities for higher education and the degrees it affords should be available to persons throughout their lifetimes, and not just immediately after high school."[15]

The Illinois Board of Higher Education is taking this and other Carnegie Commission recommendations seriously. "Ideally," says the Board, "the student in the Illinois integrated system, whatever his age, whatever his educational background, would have access to the resources of the entire system."[16]

On the same subject -- the need for permitting students to migrate freely from campus to campus -- William Rainey Harper spoke and wrote almost passionately. The artificial barriers which laissez faire institutions erected to prevent student intermigration, he said, represented

"loss and injury . . . which it is impossible to compute," adding that the "foolish independence and selfishness" of such institutions "seem wholly unworthy of the higher cause in which universities are engaged."[17] This great waste, he went on to say, "could be reduced, if those who suffer it were to cooperate intelligently."[18]

Another extremely important concept of the proposed CCM model is that of Institutional Conservation. In the harsh Social Darwinistic world in which Harper lived and worked, the fierce struggle for "survival of the fittest" was supposed to "weed out" the small, the weak, and the "unfit," and to the untimate benefit, ostensibly, of the system as a whole. Under the conditions of the more humane and sensible modern world, however, no field of educational activity can afford to sustain the economic waste of letting any of its institutions, whether public or private, succumb to the law of the jungle. A basic idea of the integrated-systems or CCM way of thinking is that all institutions, regardless of the dominant source of their support, can be conserved -- indeed, not only conserved, but strengthened.

Like most other states, Illinois now has a rather large number of private schools which, for some decades now, have been subjected to the weeding-out form of "progress." In publishing Master Plan-Phase III, the Board of Higher Education noted that included among "the most urgent of critical factors" which signalized "the great need to utilize more effectively all existing resources available to the State" was "the almost universal financial and enrollment shortages of the private colleges and universities."[19]

Thus, said the Board at another point, Master Plan-Phase III "accords interinstitutional programs a high priority throughout the State. In this

context, the private sector must be strengthened if it is to be a viable partner in this cooperative endeavor."[20]

Like the Illinois Board of Higher Education, William Rainey Harper, who in his own day was sometimes unjustly accused of designing to create a Rockefeller-like "educational trust" with his affiliation plan at the University of Chicago, valued and wished to preserve small, viable colleges, whether public or private. In the words of Eells, Harper "believed strongly in the small college, and was perhaps the best friend that it ever had."[21] And, to quote Goodspeed, Harper, in establishing the Chicago affiliating and cooperating plan (which represented, perhaps, the best example of an educational common market that ever existed in this country), Harper aimed not to destroy or "take over" the small colleges of the Middle West, but rather "to assist them in raising their standards, to add to their prestige, and to strengthen and upbuild them."[22]

From Harper's own writings, it is clear that he recognized that "regional common markets' represented one significant way to utilize and thus to preserve at least the more viable of the multitude of small colleges which dotted the landscape at the turn of the century. A cooperative "relationship entered into by the colleges of a certain district," he said, "would dignify the work of the small college and secure for it a place side by side of the institutions under state control."[23]

But small, weak colleges were not to be saved merely for the sentimental sake of saving them. The real goal -- the thing which Harper held always uppermost in mind -- was to create something which in his own time did not exist at all, and which is only now coming to exist in Illinois and in a few other states -- a truly integrated system of higher education.

"The association of the colleges of . . . a geographical district with each other, and the close association of such colleges with the universities," he said, speaking very much as an ardent CCM advocate, "will contribute toward a system of higher education . . ., the lack of which is sadly felt in every sphere of educational activity."[24]

It may seem paradoxical that Harper, an intellectual prodigy who earned his Ph.D. from Yale before he had turned nineteen, who delighted in the study and teaching of Hebrew and several other ancient languages, and who dedicately pursued one of the most esoteric of all fields of scholarship (Biblical criticism), was, at one and the same time, a modern systems thinker par excellence. And yet, that he most certainly was.

And, like his counterparts of today, Harper conceived of a system, not as a rigid and mechanical thing, but rather as a set of responding, flexible, and orderly growing parts. Noting that a true educational system "will secure results which no institution of its own strength could secure,"[25] he maintained that the very fact that it is a system "carries with it the idea of growth, and growth means change."[26]

Thus we come to a final element of the proposed CCM model -- the concept of Creative Flexibility and Orderly Growth. In a well-conceived CCM system of educational delivery, there will be no cumbersome bureaucracy or other rigid organizational structure. Instead, there will be participating institutions flexibly adapting to new environmental conditions and pursuing planned, orderly growth. And the bonds relating them into a whole by no means need to be formal lines of authority, as in the typical organizational chart. Instead, as Harper suggested, the ties can be "spiritual, and as such stronger than merely formal connections could possibly become."[27]

In the contrasting laissez faire delivery system, as can be seen from the chart, the Social Darwinistic weeding out of the "unfit" ultimately leads to the survival of overly large, rigid, and frequently highly disliked institutions -- institutions which, much experience shows, tend to breed student depersonalization, alienation, and sometimes outbreaks of campus disorder. To prevent the development of such monsters in Illinois, the Board of Higher Education has established enrollment planning maxima for each of the State's thirteen public senior institutions of higher learning, and also has limited their enrollment increases to not more than 1,000 students in any one year -- a provision which should help to revive the small private colleges while also expanding the already highly important role which the two-year community colleges play in the entire system.

But while institutional size is to be limited, the Board puts no intrastate restriction on the geographical scope of possible CCM fields of educational activity. Ultimately, as has already been noted, the Board hopes to convert the entire State into an integrated Collegiate Common Market.

Similarly, back at the turn of the century, William Rainey Harper, while recommending relatively small associations of institutions "in certain geographical districts," recognized that the basic ideas of cooperation and sharing could be realized, theoretically at least, on almost any scale. Thus it was that he proposed what is perhaps his most ambitious example of systems thinking -- the establishment of "a national university."

By a "national university," Harper meant, not an institution which would be in competition with state and private institutions, but rather a consortium of scholars and investigators drawn from the fifteen or twenty

really first-class universities which he believed this country capable of supporting. These scholars, while retaining their positions with their respective universities, would form a federation in Washington, where they would make "proper use of the great scientific treasures of all kinds which have been there collected."[28] Representing the nation's most distinguished faculty, these scholars would teach as well as carry on research. Students from all parts of the United States, though they could continue to be students of their respective colleges and universities, would be permitted to study at the national university "whenever it is to their advantage to do so." Such a plan, said Harper, "would lead to unity of effort" and would "secure a system in our work, the lack of which all concede."[29]

Today, educators may or may not agree that a "national university" would be a desirable innovation. But almost every sincere worker in the field of higher education can agree with Harper on one final point.

"It is our duty," he said, "to see that . . . /our/ work is performed in such a manner as to produce the greatest possible results with the least possible waste."[30]

That was the very thing which the Spoon River College President had in mind when he recently proposed that his own area district and three others in West-Central Illinois associate themselves into a regional Collegiate Common Market. His proposal may well be the beginning of the ultimate development of a wholly integrated system of high education for the State -- something which William Rainey Harper, as ardent a systems thinker as the American educational world has produced, would have been most gratified to have seen take place before his untimely death in 1906, almost seven decades ago.

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